

One Man's Doubts

A CITIZEN'S DISSENT. Mark Lane. Replied. By Mark Lane. 276 pp. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston. \$4.95.

By VICTOR S. NAVASKY

IN "Rush to Judgment," Mark Lane, accused by implication, if not directly, that the Warren Commission conspired to keep the truth of John F. Kennedy's assassination from the American people. In his new book, "A Citizen's Dissent," he argues that the communications establishment conspired to keep Mark Lane from the American people. In my judgment, his thesis about the Warren Commission would have been better served if his publisher had chosen to keep his latest book from the American people.

We live by a system of opinion trusteeship. Since it is never possible for us to check out all of the facts on all of the issues that concern us, as often as not we pick our authorities and adopt their fact-opinions as our own. Thus it was that when Richard Rovere legitimized doubts about the Warren Commission's methods (in his introduction to graduate student Edward Epstein's "Inquest: The Warren Commission and the Establishment of Truth"), I found myself receptive to, although not persuaded by, Mark Lane's (and others') doubts about the Commission's conclusions. Although I still believe the investigation ought to be reopened (if only because public opinion has not accepted the Commission's findings), and although I do not doubt for a moment that Mr. Lane displayed qualities of courage, persistence and ingenuity when confronted with mass-media indifference, cowardice or censorship regarding his charges, I can no longer accept him as my surrogate-researcher.

I have not read the 26 volumes of the Warren Report, and I claim no special expertise regarding President Ken-

nedy's assassination, although I guess I am an "anti-knollist" (to borrow Lane's quaint terminology, which defines everyone in relation to Lane's position)—which means that, like the Warren Commission, I do not believe shots were fired from the now famous grassy knoll in Dallas. I have read the 290 pages of what the jacket of Lane's book calls his "reply to the defenders of the Warren Report, to the press and com-

MR. NAVASKY, editor of *Monksie*, is writing a book on Robert Kennedy as Attorney General.

munications industry, to the Establishment intellectuals and commentators" and I do claim amateur expertise regarding its accuracy, having checked out a random sampling of its claims. I sent out six letters, received five replies and in each case concluded that Lane is guilty of misrepresentation, which at best leaves him with a Hellding average of 167—a poor percentage for one whose argument rests on bullet tracings and split-second, bolt-action rifle and motion-picture camera-frame tests.

If the examples that follow seem trivial, it is only because the method of the book is to bludgeon the reader with a seemingly endless supply of minor duplicities allegedly committed against an honorable and crusading Mark Lane by dishonorable and fearful minions of the media. I might say that as one who starts with a presumption against all mass-media entrepreneurs and in favor of all dissenting writers, I for one would have been prepared to live with the non-sequiturs, nit-picks, quibbles and rehash that constitute the body of this book if my confidence were not destroyed in the unimpeachable system of fact-gathering.

ON Page 81 Lane asks why the TV Guide story on the first of four C.B.S. one-hour documentaries on the Warren Report listed four critics (including Lane) and no defenders of the Report. He is upset because the program itself made only minor use of critics and supported the

Warren Commission's findings. "Had C.B.S. deliberately misled its audience as to the nature of its program in order to appeal to the vast majority who could not accept the official explanation, or had TV Guide made an error?" asks Lane after quoting a letter from TV Guide informing him (in answer to his own inquiry) that the story was "based on information provided by the producer of the program." In fact TV Guide's story was accurate and its letter to Lane quoted out of context. The letter explicitly stated, "The producer gave us a number of names of persons interviewed, and the person who wrote the Close-up for us edited the list to a representative group."

On page 38 Lane describes his dealings with Grove Press, which originally commissioned but never published "Rush to Judgment." He clearly implies that his book was the victim of censorship and states that the publisher made himself inaccessible. What he fails to mention, according to Grove Press publisher Barney Rosset, who calls Lane's account "totally false," was that Lane had failed to meet the delivery

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terms of the contract and when it was due. Grove wrote him asking for his book. "He did not send it to us," says Rosset, "and we consequently became somewhat disillusioned with him because we felt timeliness was of great importance."

On page 28 Lane tells how his appearance on David Susskind's "Hot Line" program was canceled. According to Lane, the "producer" told him it was canceled because "WPIX is owned by the Daily News and David has a terrible contract with the station. He cannot control the programs." She added that David had been ordered to cancel my appearance and in doing so he "was just following orders."

David Susskind's version is quite different. "When I discovered that Mark Lane had been invited to appear, I raised holy hell with the staff member . . . he was, in my view, ghoulishly muddying the issues of the Commission's report. I ordered the invitation . . . withdrawn forthwith, telling the production person I didn't want him on the show. Since that production person is now my wife, I assure you that this version is correct. She informed me that she told Mr. Lane I

did not want him on the show, out of personal conviction. She said it had nothing to do with the station or any other sinister conspiracy, which he suggested was at the root of the issue."

On page 83 Lane cites a letter from C.B.S. producer Leslie Midgley to Raymond J. Marcus, an early critic of the Commission's conclusions. He quotes the last sentence of the letter (which confirms his point), and omits the first two sentences, which explain why it would be a mistake to attach importance to the material referred to in the last sentence.

One could, I suspect, go on ad infinitum. I know that honest men differ over where context stops and distortion begins; I know that many authors miss deadlines and aren't penalized; and I know that producers' assistants (even wives) have been known to tell disappointed guests one thing and their boss another. Therefore the main moral I would urge on Mark Lane is a heightened sensitivity to the unreliability of so-called eyewitnesses, even when the witness is the victim and the victim is oneself. ♦

Author's Query

For a biography of John Gregg Fee (1816-1901), Kentucky Abolitionist and clergyman, I would appreciate any pertinent information.

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